



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Session Plan

Environmentalism As a Spiritual Practice

Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church, Hayward, CA, Kathryn LaMar, April 27, 2022

CHALICE LIGHTING/INTRODUCTION

Ethics that focus on human interactions, morals that focus on humanity's relationship to a Creator ... fail to encompass the big take-home message, so far, of a century and a half of biology and ecology: life is- more than anything else- a *process*; it creates, and depends on, *relationships* among energy, land, water, air, time and various living things. It's not just about human-to-human interaction; it's not just about spiritual interaction. It's about *all* interaction. We're bound with the rest of life in a network, a network including not just all living things but the energy and nonliving matter that flows through the living, making and keeping all of us alive as we make *it* alive. We can keep debating ideologies and sending entreaties toward heaven. But unless we embrace the fuller reality we're in- and reality's implications- we'll face big problems.

Carl Safina

COMMUNITY SINGING: FOR THE EARTH FOREVER TURNING (Kim Oler)
 (No. 163 in Grey Hymnal)

SILENT MEDITATION / CENTERING (2 min)

The first sound of the gong brings us to silence. Please take time to center yourself, and temporarily push aside whatever might be preventing you from participating fully in this session. The second sound of the gong returns us to each other's presence.

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS)

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met. When you finish, choose who goes next.

QUOTES FROM MICHAEL MOORE'S ESSAY "AT EARTH DAY'S END"

I, like many of you, have warned and pleaded for years that we are killing our planet. How arrogant of me, of all of us, to think we could pull such a thing off! Oooh, look at us — *sooo powerful*, so all-knowing and invincible, *we humans* — WE think WE can kill a planet! No, my friends. *Long* before we kill Earth, Earth will kill us.

This massive living organism of iron, nickel, magnesium, silicon, nitrogen and oxygen has one purpose — to LIVE — and it has identified its greatest threat, ... has reared its head and begun its extinction of the one species that, if allowed to continue, will turn Earth into one big dead rock ... The 4,000 interior miles below us will keep cranking away with its magnetic field and orbiting powers.

Nature made sure from the beginning, since we crawled our slimy selves out of the ocean, that our brains would evolve very slowly to ensure we would never get to fully orchestrate the Earth's end. Nature knew we'd be too stupid to stop our destructive ways, too gluttonous to control our mad desires for MORE, MORE, MORE.

Of course, Mother Nature could have made the rest of us smarter, faster, so that we would recognize the false prophets and the scammers ... and if we had the brains to know better we would not participate in bringing about our own demise. But alas the Earth didn't really trust us. So Nature encased trillions of deadly bacteria in our bodies, gave us white blood cells and an immune system to fight them off ...

But why not forgo putting the bacteria in us in the first place? Because Nature needed a choke leash on us idiots who could kill her. She needed a poison pill that she could release, should we get out of hand.

And so, bit by bit, Mother is slowly giving us the poison drip. It started with polluted air and water. We quickly tried to address that. Then came 421 ppm of carbon in our atmosphere. Then the glaciers began melting. Then our weather went insane, never to return to normal. All were warnings we witnessed but chose to ignore and follow the wrong leadership who had the wrong ideas in addressing the deluge.

So Mother Nature upped the ante. And along came the coronavirus. We don't want to admit it or believe she would do this to us, but let me say out loud what most don't want to tell you because they don't think you can handle the truth: These viruses are here to stay.

And so now Earth is going to protect itself and teach us a lesson. Because Nature's ... shutting us down like the astronaut did in "2001: A Space Odyssey" to the ship's computer brain ... Bit by bit, because we let our arrogance and false sense of superiority run our lives, we were brought to our knees and humbled by the rising oceans and the million Covid dead.

There is, as always in the movies, a way out. It would require each and every one of us to be brave, get busy, and take no prisoners.

The profit motive would have to be severely restricted, all wealth would have to be distributed fairly so that no one suffers, and we would learn to live and be joyful with less. We would finally create a government organized as a true democracy which would own and run our transportation and energy systems and slow down the use of fossil fuels ... How do we replace the fossil fuels for the products we use/need in our daily lives? There are smart people who know how to do this!

We need a million Gretas to rise up and run things. This can happen. You didn't think people would ever stop smoking in bars! Change can happen right now if you so will it! WILL IT! DO IT!

OTHER QUOTES TO PONDER

If the soul wants to know God, it cannot do so in time. For so long as the soul is conscious of time or space or any other [object], it cannot know God. *Ken Wilber*

The immersive ugliness of the built environment in the USA is entropy made visible. It indicates not simple carelessness but a vivid drive toward destruction, decay and death: the stage-set of a literal "death trip," of a society determined to commit suicide. Far from being a mere matter of aesthetics, suburbia represents a compound economic catastrophe, ecological debacle, political nightmare, and spiritual crisis — for a nation of

people conditioned to spend their lives in places not worth caring about.

James Howard Kunstler

The world is not a problem to be solved; it is a living being to which we belong. The world is part of our own self and we are a part of its suffering wholeness. Until we go to the root of our image of separateness, there can be no healing. And the deepest part of our separateness from creation lies in our forgetfulness of its sacred nature, which is also our own sacred nature.

Thích Nhất Hạnh

There is a saying that “the psychotic drowns in the waters that the mystic swims in.” The health and structural integrity of the ego means the difference between spiritual emergence, the unfolding of a transpersonal identity; and a spiritual emergency, a crisis brought on by the same unfolding, during which the foundations of sanity can be shaken.

Jason Kirkey

The pollution of the outward environment we are witnessing is only the mirror and the consequence of the inward environment, to which we pay too little heed. I think that this is also the defect of the ecological movements. They crusade with an understandable and also legitimate passion against the pollution of the environment, whereas man's self-pollution of his soul continues to be treated as one of the rights of his freedom.

There is a discrepancy here. We want to eliminate the measurable pollution, but we don't consider the pollution of man's soul and his creaturely form ... he must acknowledge himself as a creature and realise that there must be a sort of inner purity to his creatureliness: spiritual ecology, if you will.

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Anarchism is not only a stateless society but also a harmonized society that exposes man to the stimuli provided by both agrarian and urban life, to physical activity and mental activity, to unrepressed sensuality and self-directed spirituality, to communal solidarity and individual development, to regional uniqueness and worldwide brotherhood, to spontaneity and self-discipline, to the elimination of toil and the promotion of craftsmanship.

Murray Bookchin

The ecological crisis is only an externalization of an inner malaise and cannot be solved without a spiritual rebirth of Western man ... It is still our hope that as the crisis created by man's forgetfulness of who he really is grows and that as the idols of his own making crumble one by one before his eyes, he will begin a true reform of himself, which always means a spiritual rebirth, and through this rebirth attain a new harmony with the world of nature around him. .

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

FILM: JOANNA MACY | CLIMATE CRISIS AS SPIRITUAL PATH (~2 min)

[show film to be found at: <https://www.kosmosjournal.org/kj_article/joanna-macy/>]

COMMUNITY SINGING: JOHN BALL (SYDNEY CARTER) [LYRICS APPENDED]

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION

Read the Group Reflection questions, one by one.

BREAK

GROUP REFLECTION / FEEDBACK

Two rounds, or respectfully discuss each participant's ideas AFTER they have finished. Take a moment of silence and consider your response to one or more of these questions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON SPIRITUAL VIEWS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

Most of these are based on those provided in the study guide accompanying the film "Climate Crisis as Spiritual Path."

- ☺ When have you experienced a connection to nature? How has it influenced what you've thought or said or done? Have you "heard within yourself the sounds of the earth crying?"
- ☺ Joanna Macy reflects the view of "deep ecology" that the life energy flowing through us is the same life energy that flows through the rivers and the mountains, the trees and the forests, and all the plants and the animals. How might such an understanding help us respond to the climate crisis?
- ☺ Buddhists believe that what we perceive as happening outside us is also happening inside us. Is that in any way true for you?
- ☺ Joanna recently framed the essential question challenging us this way, "Our species is destroying our world. How can we live in full presence and enjoy it in a world that is destroying itself?" How would you respond?
- ☺ Joanna Macy and her colleague Anita Barrows have translated the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who sees the world as sacred. Is there a sense in which you see the world, nature, or creation as sacred?
- ☺ Rilke wrote: "Now you must go out into your heart as onto a vast plain. Now the immense loneliness begins." What are your thoughts?
- ☺ What steps can YOU take to prevent urgency from depriving "you of the capacity to let life through in the biggest doorway of your being?"
- ☺ Did any of Moore's or the other quotes strike you? How so, and how would you respond or react?

**COMMUNITY SINGING: BLUE BOAT HOME(PETER MAYER)
(No. 1064 in Teal Hymnal)**

FUTURE PLANS

If you want, we can discuss / process how Reverenda Maria-Cristina's announced impending departure has affected you, and what changes you would like us to consider for this coming summer and during the transition to the incoming interim minister

Suggestions for topics to be reflected upon at our fourth-Wednesday meetings?

Plans for second-Wednesday meal sharing and discussions—Restaurants, discussion topics.

SESSION FEEDBACK

What changes would you have made to the session to make it more meaningful for you?

Is it time to revisit our covenant?

EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS

First we have to step out of our dream of separation, the insularity with which we have imprisoned ourselves, and acknowledge that we are a part of a multidimensional living spiritual being we call the world. The world is much more than just the physical world we perceive through the senses, just as we are much more than just our own physical bodies. Only as a part of a living whole can we help to heal the whole. Just as we need to work together with the outer ecosystem, we need to work together with the inner worlds. We need their support and help, their power and knowledge. The devas understand the patterns of climate change better than we do, because they are the forces behind the weather and the winds. Just as plant devas know the healing powers of plants (and taught the shamans and healers their knowledge), so are there more powerful devas that know and guide the patterns of evolution of the whole planet.

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

JOHN BALL
(Sydney Carter)

Who will be the lady,
Who will be the lord,
When we are ruled
By the love of another? Tell me,
Who will be the lady,
Who will be the lord,
In the light that is coming
In the morning.

CHORUS

Sing, John Ball
And tell it to them all -
Long live the day that is
dawning!
And I'll crow like a cock,
I'll carol like a lark,
For the light that is coming
In the morning.

Eve is the lady [the Queen],
Adam is the lord [the King],
When we are ruled
By the love of another, oh it's
Eve is the lady [the Queen],
Adam is the lord [the King],
In the light that is coming
In the morning.

CHORUS

All shall be ruled
By fellowship I say,
All shall be ruled
By the love of one another,
All shall be ruled
By fellowship I say,
In the light that is coming
In the morning.

CHORUS

Labour and spin
For fellowship I say,
Labour and spin
For the love of one another.
Labour and spin
For fellowship I say,
And the light that is coming
In the morning.

CHORUS